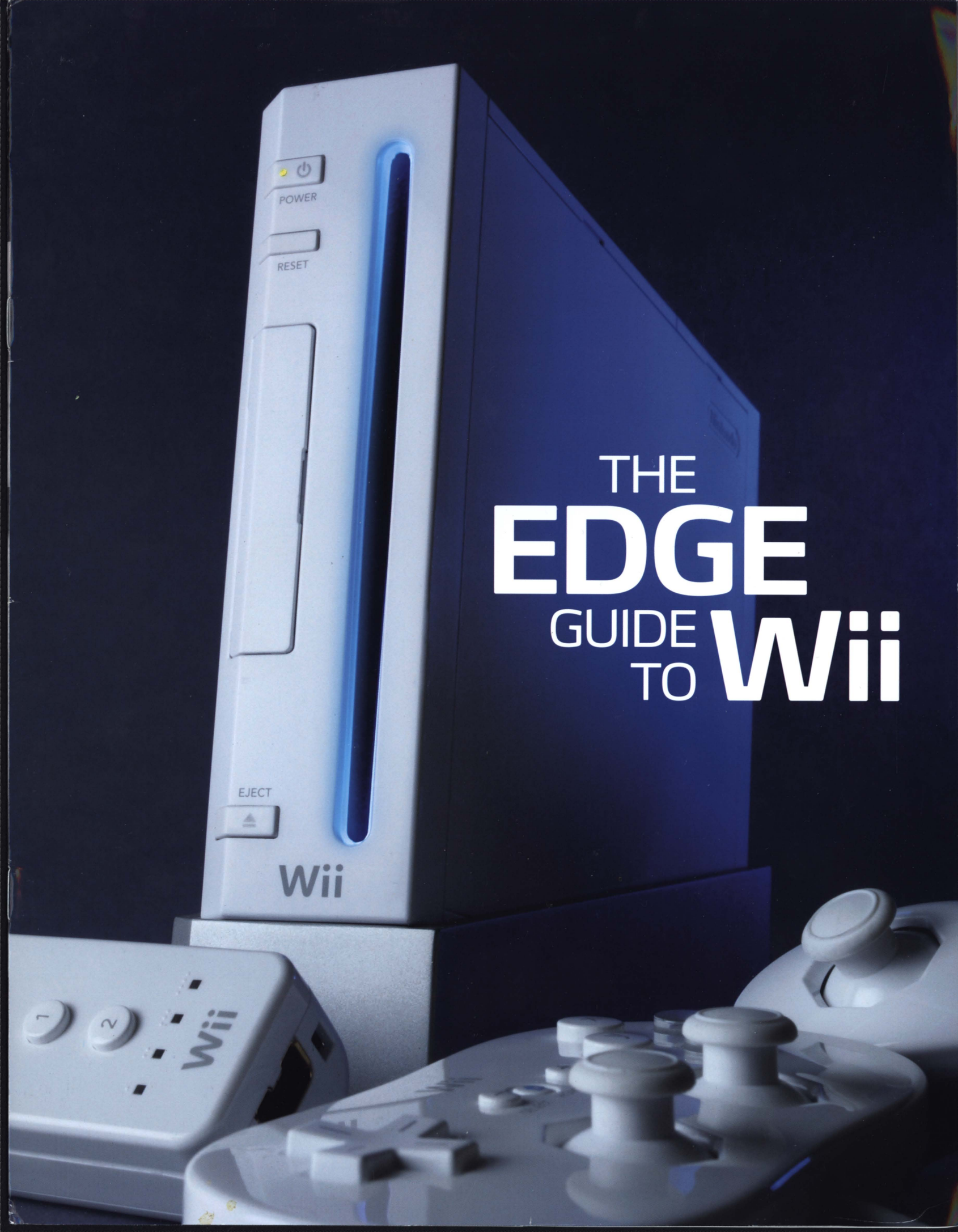


THE EDGE GUIDE TO Wii

Photography: **Nick Wilson**

THE NEW BEGINNING

At Nintendo's official Wii reveal to the European press at ExCeL in London's Docklands at the beginning of September, the company furnished a hangar-like space with 60 Wii consoles running tasters from games slated for launch, or soon after. It was a confident, well-orchestrated, successful event.

As is convention for all such presentations, each demo unit was overseen by a Nintendo company representative eager to help curious guests find their way around what was being shown – a particularly important consideration, you'd think, with a piece of videogaming hardware as defiantly different as this.

However, attending to the interests of journos from broadsheet newspapers, lifestyle magazines and dedicated gaming publications wasn't the expected procession of young, skinny, shiny girls offering helping hands. Instead, Nintendo had hired... well, just a bunch of people. A woman in her 50s who claimed to have never touched a videogame before that very morning was demoing Konami's *Elebits*. A short, stocky man in his 30s was helping those who wanted to learn more about HudsonSoft's *Wing Island*. These 'regular' people, hired from an agency that specialised in delivering 'regular' people, were going to be responsible for introducing to the press the most innovative concept videogaming has seen since virtual reality first raised its angular, slightly ridiculous-looking head in the early '90s.

Why? Because these 'regular' people are Nintendo's ultimate target audience for Wii. And who better to show what the console is all about, goes the thinking, than the very people whose lives it's intended to change?

If it succeeds in doing so, it won't be only via gaming, and, over the page, we begin to look at why, building a clearer picture of perhaps the most fascinating product ever to have emerged from Nintendo's Japanese labs.

The Wii game plan p4
Wii hardware p8
Wii software p11
Q&A: Lauren Fischer p16

THE WII GAME PLAN

HOW WILL NINTENDO'S NEW CONSOLE REDEFINE GAMING? AND WHAT CHALLENGES WILL IT FACE?

At this year's Edinburgh Interactive Entertainment Festival, attendees were set a quiz, a come-on-let's-see-how-much-you-really-know-about-gaming challenge devised by a renowned industry analyst. Among the questions was this: Which is the odd one out among Sony's PSP, Microsoft's Xbox 360 and Nintendo's Wii? The answer was Nintendo's Wii, because, apparently, it's the only one of the trio lacking multimedia aspirations. Yes, Nintendo's Wii, which connects to the internet out of the box. Which has its own dedicated Weather and Shopping Channels. Which wants to remain permanently connected to the Nintendo motherbrain via WiiConnect24.

Nintendo's newest entertainment system has been frequently misunderstood ever since it debuted to selected press behind closed doors during Tokyo Game Show '05. This, it turns out, is the problem with being different.

In this respect, Wii has followed the path laid out by DS, which at first sight appeared to show Nintendo as a company that was clutching at straws. Here was a handheld console whose feature set looked like a jumble of ticked boxes entirely lacking in coherence. It didn't help that launch titles such as *Super Mario 64 DS* made no attempt to demonstrate how a piece of portable gaming hardware could make harmonious, meaningful use of Wi-Fi connectivity, a two-screen display, an onboard microphone and touchscreen sensitivity. It was only later, with the appearance of games such as *Nintendogs* and *Brain Training*, that the DS vision crystallised. With 21 million worldwide sales in the 22 months since, and with leadership over Sony's PSP – once clearly earmarked as the platform that would bring Nintendo's ages-old dominance of the handheld gaming market to an end – solidly established, it has become clear that new ways of thinking, and perhaps as importantly the confidence to execute on that thinking, can still bring about wild success, even in an industry that has, in recent times, allowed itself to become too processed, too watered-down, too reluctant to take risks.

Nintendo has taken two big, specific risks in designing Wii the way it has. The first is the most tangible: its primary, accelerometer-powered control system, consisting of the analogue stick-driven Nunchuk allied to the more complex Remote. Not all of the console's applications are designed to make use of both, of course, but it is when the two parts of the puzzle are working in tandem that Wii's absolute dedication to changing the way we play marks it out as something that earns it the Revolution moniker it once bore.

> Wii has been frequently misunderstood. This, it seems, is the problem with being different

There is no question that, in terms of functionality, it works, and with a preciseness you aren't expecting from a piece of such inexpensive technology. The lag that has been evident in certain PS3 tilt-sensitive Sixaxis game demos, for example, simply does not exist. (It may not exist in those PS3 apps, either, once they're finished, but the Wii Remote has worked all along.)

But it's all well and good the hardware doing its job; it's another thing to turn that functionality into something meaningful to play – which is where the Wii picture becomes a little cloudier. Simple point-and-shoot gameplay – exemplified in Konami's *Elebits*, in which the Remote simply moves an onscreen reticule as you would move one in a PC FPS with a mouse, allowing you to line up shots before stabbing a fire button – throws up no concerns, but it's when game designs become more ambitious – when gesture-based inputs become involved, for example – that the system's complexity becomes an issue of greater stature. "Working out actions which cross over with other actions is very tricky and developers need to work around that, or design games differently," says one developer with close ties to Nintendo. "Things like *Wario Ware* can work because the movements are very restricted in general, so it can react in real time (there's no technical reason for lag in the system). Similarly, sensitivity, and when to decide an action has been started/completed, etc, is really tricky – in many



Nintendo Company Ltd president Satoru Iwata officially lifts the lid on Revolution, as Wii was known until May this year, at a press conference prior to the opening of Tokyo Game Show '05



TUNING INTO WII CHANNELS

Power up an internet-connected Wii and you'll be presented with an options menu in the form of a grid of 'screens' (above), each dedicated to a specific Wii Channel or Virtual Console game quickstart. You can arrange these in any manner you see fit, allowing you to cluster together your favourites (excluding the Disc Channel, which always sits in the top-left corner). Nintendo has so far announced eight Channels, but promises that there are 'plenty more Channels to come':

DISC CHANNEL

The entry-point into whatever's sitting in your Wii's drive, whether it's an 8cm GameCube disc or 12cm Wii disc.

MII CHANNEL

Drops you into Wii's unique create-an-avatar facility, enabling the creation of a suite of characters (one for all the family, perhaps) that can be used in certain games, starting with *Wii Sports*. The building blocks are basic but absolutely brimming with charm, which should allow you to generate something which makes up for in charisma what it lacks in photoreal authenticity. Once created, your avatars plop into the avatar storage area, a hive of milling activity that can be brought to order with whistle-punctuated commands, *Pikmin* style.

PHOTO CHANNEL

Slide in your SD card and this Channel will pull down the photos it contains for easy slide-show viewing and, if you like, manipulation (effects include pixellation, copy and pasting, plus brightness/colour control, and you can also draw or place stamps on the images as if this were a Photo-Me booth in your living room). More adventurous users may also consider adding MP3 audio accompaniment to their slide shows, and sending their creations to other Wii users via the Message Board option.

FORECAST CHANNEL

An easily navigable globe (simply point your Remote at a certain spot, grab hold of it by pressing 'A', then flick your wrist to start it spinning) allows you to gather realtime data on the worldwide climate, by city. Makes use of WiiConnect24 for automatic updates.

NEWS CHANNEL

At the time of writing, Nintendo is still ironing out the finer details of this Channel in European territories, with the super-powerful CNN already signed up as the provider of its content in Japan and the US. In use, news stories will be presented by category, and their origin mapped on to the aforementioned 3D globe.

WII SHOP CHANNEL

At launch, only Japan will be getting access to this Channel, but Nintendo will be working quickly to make it live to wider territories since it will be the gateway to making Virtual Console purchases. It will also be possible to buy Wii Points here, initially at £14.99 per 2,000. (For the record, NES games will cost from 500WP, SNES games from 800WP, and N64 games from 1,000WP. Mega Drive and Turbo Grafx game prices have yet to be set.)

INTERNET CHANNEL

Clicking into this Channel brings up the quick-boot Opera browser, optimised specifically for Wii use. Operationally, there are parallels with the DS equivalent, with good support for text zooming, Flash, etc.

WII MESSAGE BOARD

This is the hub of juicy WiiConnect24 activity, since new maps, items or other game enhancements from Nintendo (or other game makers) will arrive here, where multiple users can also leave notes for each other. An added bonus is the ability to share messages and photos with mobiles.

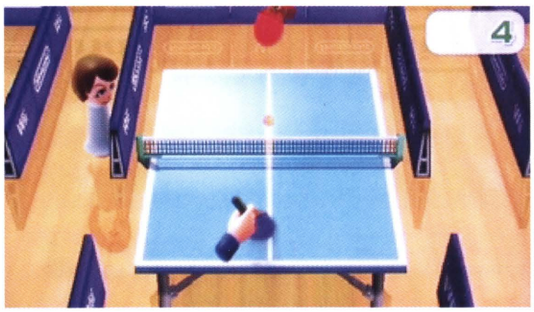
VIRTUAL INSANITY

If there's one element of the Wii package that seems certain to disappoint, at least at the outset, it's its Virtual Console, because Nintendo has confirmed that only games previously released in the user's host territory will be made available for download. This means, of course, that a number of SNES classics, for example, will be missing from the roster in the UK. That's right – no *Chrono Trigger*, no *Final Fantasy III*, and no *EarthBound*, for starters. You'll be able to get around the restriction by purchasing a US Wii and using US Wii Points to pay for games (even if you're downloading them from the UK), but it does slightly tarnish the overall Wii vision. Hopefully, demand will be strong enough that Nintendo will eventually find a way of addressing this issue.

game cases, literally impossible. Like with the DS, some games will fit, some new ideas will shine, some will get away with it, and others will fail miserably." The key, then, lies in implementation. And you can be sure that we'll see as many half-baked games that fail to make worthwhile use of Wii's capabilities as there are DS games that fail to exploit that piece of hardware's suite of options. Because, since Wii's full playable debut at E3 in May, where it attracted more attention and longer queues than anything else in LA that week, publishers have been scrambling to ramp up their commitments to the platform, most having previously marked it down as a low priority (Sega, for example, is said to have moved a significant number of development staff from PS3 to Wii projects over the summer).

What's clear is that Wii's innovative control mechanics have a strong appeal within a traditionally non-gaming audience: to someone who's never played a game before, removing a complex contemporary joypad from the equation is to lift a particularly unfriendly-looking barrier. But what about those whose gaming lives have long since incorporated DualShock-shaped mechanisms? Certainly anyone who's truly into videogaming will be keen to see how Nintendo's new controllers work, but how many of them will actually *prefer* to use the Remote and Nunchuk rather than a traditional joypad once that first giddy wave of inquisitiveness has given way to a level of familiarity? The appearance of *Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess* in two different flavours will surely bring answers to some interesting questions for Nintendo.

The second big Wii design risk is the console's image-processing capacity. Nintendo has put Wii's graphical fidelity at 'two to three times' better than GameCube's. Do *Twilight Princess* or *Super Mario Galaxy*, the best-looking Wii games shown to date, really look even twice as good as the best GameCube titles? Well, they're certainly being rendered in true 16:9 widescreen format, but there's nothing in either title to stomp on the most eye-popping moments of, say, *Resident Evil 4*. And, with an old-fashioned single-core system



Buy a second Remote and you'll receive a free collection of minigames, entitled *Wii Play*, offering diversions such as a pool/billiards sim and a natty *Pong* clone

architecture, there's not as much left to be squeezed out of the box as there is from Xbox 360 and, more significantly, PS3.

And it's Wii's graphical performance when compared to Xbox 360 and PS3, not GameCube, that is the nub of the issue here. As informal research at your local game retailer will reveal, many buying decisions are being made on the strength of the pictures on the back of the box and the visual quality of the action being pumped on to promo and demo pod monitors. To these consumers, *MotorStorm* on PS3 is going to absolutely steamroller *Excite Truck* on Wii if the two are demonstrated side by side. Taking the rougher-looking Wii games against the top-tier PS3 titles, the scenario will be akin to putting an 8bit console next to a 16bit machine. To those uninterested in the finer points of the respective platforms, there will be no argument, no contest. And remember: PS3 has that there new-fangled motion-sensing control, too, right?

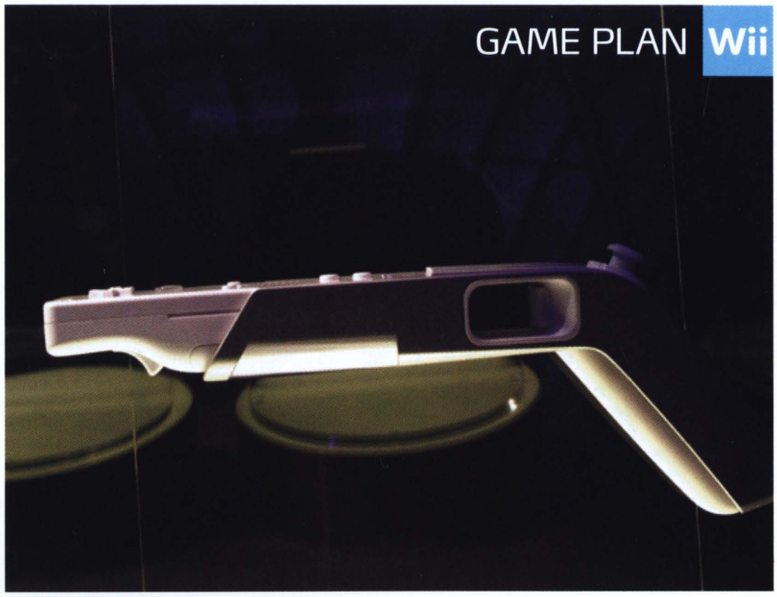
Why did Nintendo pull out of the graphical arms race? Not only because it wanted to pledge a very public commitment to gameplay over graphics but, more than that, because it wanted to create console that had the potential to become truly massmarket, having decided that the comparatively high price points of Xbox 360 and, particularly, PS3 would resign those formats to ploughing established furrows when the real revenue opportunities existed in the neighbouring



A handful of the Virtual Console downloadable games planned for Wii (clockwise from above left): *Donkey Kong* (NES), *Super Mario 64* (N64), *The Legend Of Zelda* (NES), *Ecco The Dolphin* (Mega Drive), *New Adventure Island* (Turbo Grafx), *Ristar* (Mega Drive), *ToeJam & Earl* (Mega Drive), *Super Mario World* (SNES). It is said that certain games will benefit from emulation on Wii, in much the same way that the *Wind Waker* edition of *Ocarina Of Time* was enhanced on GameCube



The original plan was to offer Wii in a range of colours. For now, all territories will get standard off-white. Meanwhile, the 'pistol' adaptor (far right) remains only a prototype



field, whose surface has only been scratched.

In Japan, Wii will go on sale on December 2 at ¥25,000 (£113). Nintendo's intention is to make it a household device for everyone. Which is not to say something that can be used by everyone (although it will be that), but something that will be *bought* by everyone. It wants, in short, to make Wii consoles as ubiquitous as DVD players. (Interestingly, although Nintendo has removed DVD movie playback from the Wii spec sheet, it plans to launch in Japan next year an enhanced Wii capable of just such a feature.)

It is not quite so cheap in western markets, of course, clocking in at £180 in the UK and $250 in the US. It has been said that Nintendo intended to bring Wii to shop shelves in these territories for £150 and $200, but became influenced by pressure from the larger retail chains, which raised concerns over margins and low so-called 'basket value' (ie, the amount of revenue generated from a customer's overall purchase at the till). Although it's difficult to sympathise with such fears when you begin to add up the cost of a Wii console, a copy of *Twilight Princess*, a Classic Controller, plus, well, let's throw in another Remote so we can get going straight away with two players on the packed-in *Wii Sports* – oh, and we'd better take 2,000 Wii Points, too, in case there's anything on the Virtual Console download service that takes our fancy (total cost: £280).

Nonetheless – and this point is a vital one – £180 is still low enough for committed gamers who're already investing in an Xbox 360 or PS3 to be able to pick up a Wii as a second console.

But planning a revolution by 'only' reinventing game control and wrapping it around super-affordable technology was not enough for Nintendo. In the same way that other companies would have designed DS with dual-screen functionality and left it at that, believing that their work was done, Nintendo's Wii development has progressed, and it has been building an entire network strategy around its new console in the form of WiiConnect24 and Wii Channels. And this network strategy, more than a dozen new *Mario* or *Zelda* or *Pokemon* or *Brain Training* games, represents the company's future.

Make no mistake: Wii's approach to networked entertainment isn't just a bolted-on afterthought, it is fundamental to the console's make-up, and has the potential to be remembered as the touch of genius that put Nintendo consoles back into the centre of the living room. Whereas in the past, Nintendo home consoles have been static, and entirely dependent on the next cartridge/disc their users were able to throw their way, the plan is for Wii to never stop adding value to its users' lives. Some days that may manifest itself in the mere seconds it takes to boot up and access its web browser on the living room TV. On others it may be turning on your console to find a surprise package awaiting your attention from a fellow *Animal Crossing* resident or *Nintendogs* owner or Pokemon collector. It may lie in downloading independently produced Wii games or free demos for your DS via Virtual Console. In theory, it could be the offer of a new suite of *Brain Training* challenges for not very much money, with no need to journey to a shop for the privilege. Perhaps, in the not-too-distant future, it's turning on your Wii and being able to use it to watch the Nintendo TV Channel, consisting of nothing but Nintendo-related content such as show reports, tips and interviews (and advertisements for lots of new Nintendo games, of course). There are, after all, plenty of Wii Channel slots remaining to be filled...

The Wii Channels concept isn't just bolted on – it is fundamental to the console's make-up

Is Nintendo's package a more convincing one than Microsoft's established Xbox Live strategy? Like-for-like comparisons simply cannot be drawn: Microsoft's solution is more directly game-oriented, where Nintendo is lifestyle-centric. As for Sony, it's difficult to make *any* comparisons between Wii and PS3's network ambitions.

What is certain is that, while Wii may be more comparable to its predecessor than Xbox 360 and PS3 in terms of what's inside the casing, in every other respect that matters it is absolutely unlike GameCube, whose most exciting network ambitions ran to linking up a GBA to play as Tingle in *Wind Waker* or a cluster of handhelds to add a spin to *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*.

Wii is different to GameCube and different to any other console that's ever been made. But it's only when you get the opportunity to use it yourself, to jiggle its controllers and poke around with its Channels, that the difference will really become clear. Here in the UK that opportunity arrives on December 8.



Wii's Photo Channel (above left) is fast and flexible, while the Internet Channel (above right) makes use of a custom Opera browser (free for a long trial period)



Like DS before it, Nintendo's Wii has been refined in view of watchful eyes: the original Remote (left), first shown at Tokyo Game Show '05, lacked the finished version's onboard speaker (right), and also featured two 'A' buttons, weirdly

THE HARD SELL

THINGS TO PLAY WITH AT LAUNCH

WII CONSOLE (£180)

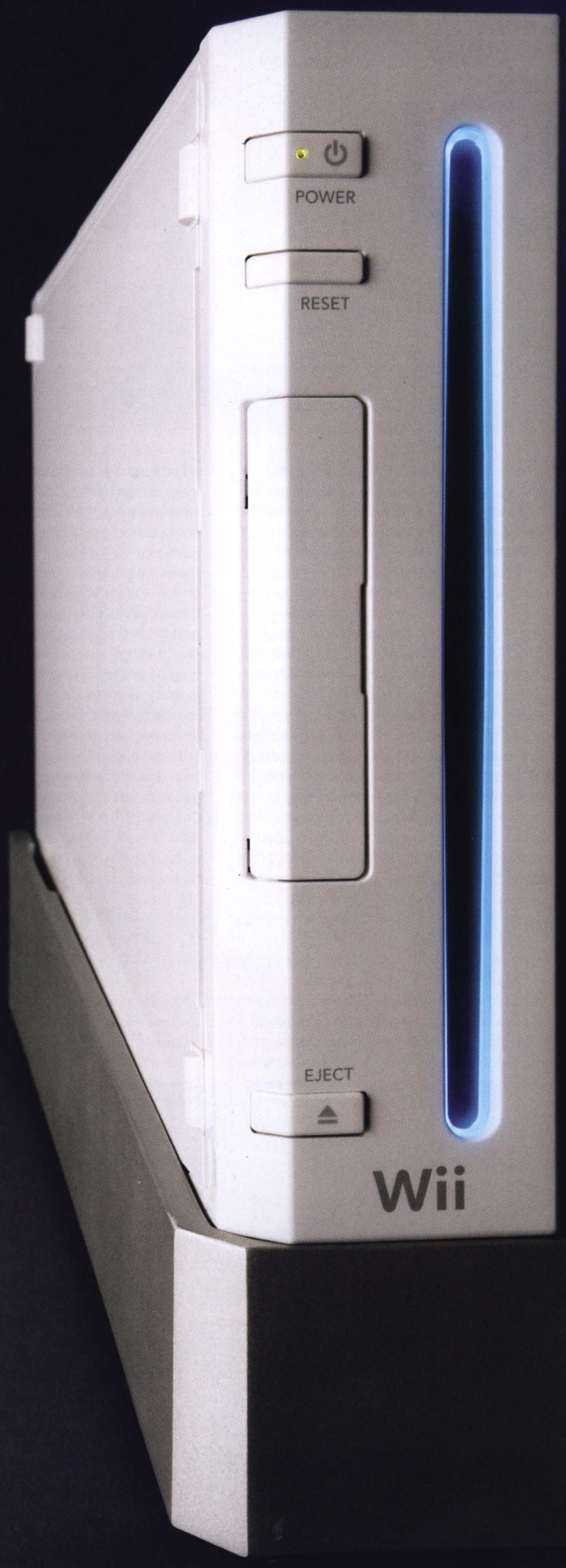
So committed is it to not entering into a specs battle with Sony and Microsoft that Nintendo will simply not reveal the exact nature of the technology sitting beneath Wii's refined off-white exterior, stating only that the CPU, codenamed 'Broadway', is a PowerPC-based unit 'joint-engineered' with IBM, and that the GPU is an ATi-designed solution.

It is keen, however, to play up the platform's 512MB of internal flash memory, used for Virtual Console downloads, etc. Additional memory can be added by simply using SD cards, although Nintendo has yet to confirm whether Wii will be compatible with the SD-HC (High Capacity) format, which currently tops out at 8GB. Regardless, 2GB SD cards at around £40 each will surely prove popular options.

Externally, the Wii hardware features a standard Nintendo-style AV-out port, running to component (supporting up to 480p), composite or S-video; two standard USB 2.0 ports; an SD flash memory card slot; two GameCube memory card slots; and four GameCube controller ports (also compatible with WaveBird controllers). The facia, meanwhile, features three buttons (Power, Reset, Eject) and a flap, which covers the SD card, memory card and joypad ports (the USB 2.0 ports are situated at the console's rear).

In terms of connectivity, the Wii console will communicate via Wi-Fi to DS units (for downloading game demos and other content, and possibly for messaging in the future), and can be routed to the internet via a USB 2.0 LAN adaptor if a Wi-Fi network is unavailable.

Standing just 157mm wide, 215.4mm tall and 44mm thick, Wii is small enough to fit into even the most cluttered AV setups, although it gains stature when placed in its stand, which comes packed into every box. The slightly ghostly blue which emanates from its disc slot, meanwhile, ensures it a vibe unlike any other game console's.





REMOTE (ONE PACKED IN; ADDITIONAL UNIT: £30)

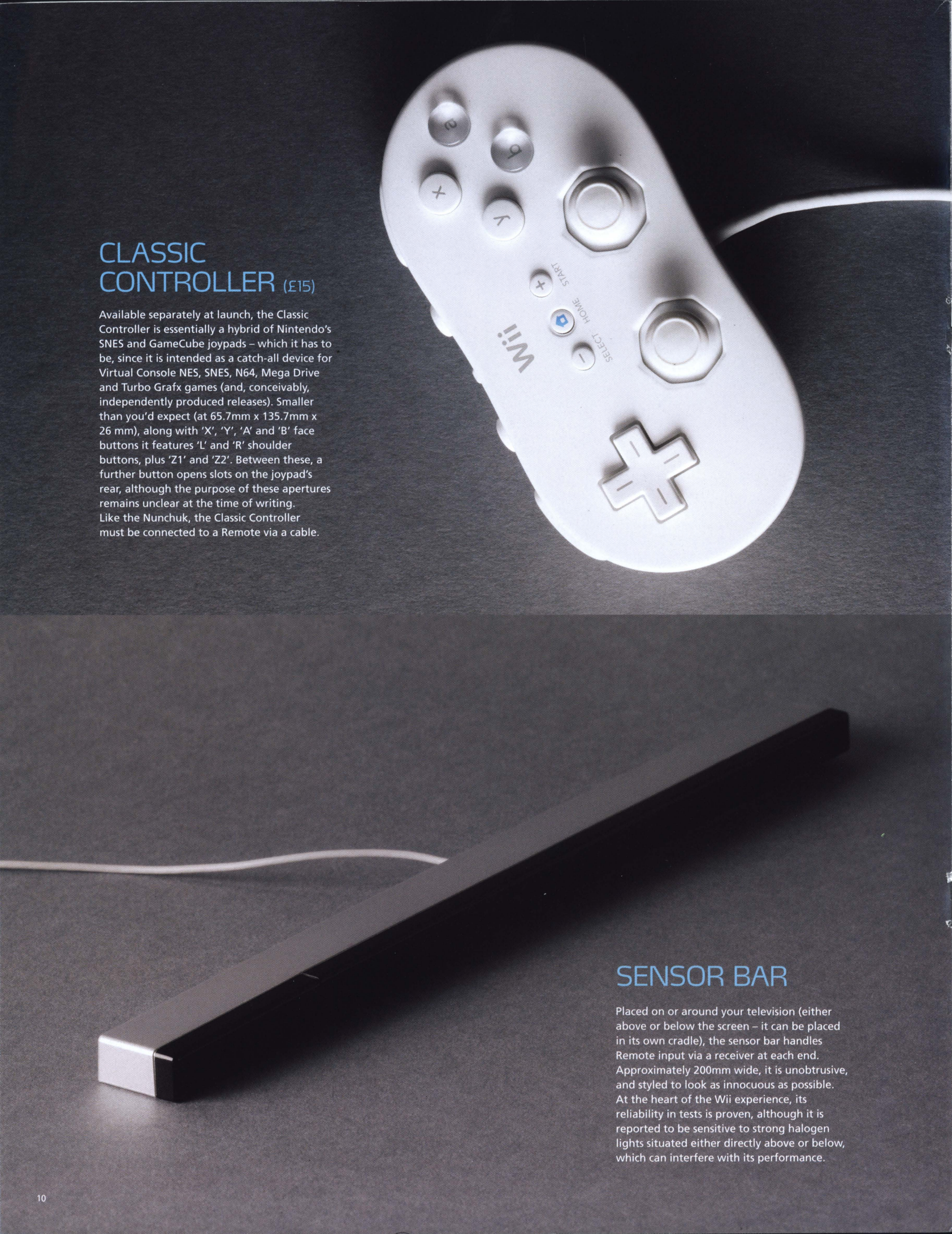
The primary method of Wii input links to the console via a Bluetooth connection with the sensor bar (see page 10), and can be used at a range of up to ten metres (effective for five metres with applications that use pointing inputs), with up to four in use simultaneously. User preferences, including Wii Mii avatars, can be saved to 6KB of onboard memory. Power is supplied via two AA batteries, and although Nintendo estimates 60 hours' use in simple accelerometer-based games, this will drop significantly with more intensive applications and when used in conjunction with the Nunchuk add-on. The unit's underside features a trigger-style 'B' button and also a 'sync' button, serving to tie multiple controller inputs to their respective players. The Remote also features built-in rumble and a small onboard speaker.



NUNCHUK (ONE PACKED IN; ADDITIONAL UNIT: £15)

Connecting to the Remote via a short cable (it cannot be used solely on its own), the Nunchuk also features accelerometer technology for motion-based input. Of more obvious use is its analogue joystick, whose design is modelled on Nintendo's GameCube controller template. The Nunchuk's underside features two buttons, 'C' and 'Z', the latter fashioned in a more obvious trigger shape than the Remote's 'B' button.

Because it does not require batteries, the Nunchuk feels unusually light in operation, although the inclusion of a rumble facility ensures that it has a tactile quality.



CLASSIC CONTROLLER (£15)

Available separately at launch, the Classic Controller is essentially a hybrid of Nintendo's SNES and GameCube joypads – which it has to be, since it is intended as a catch-all device for Virtual Console NES, SNES, N64, Mega Drive and Turbo Grafx games (and, conceivably, independently produced releases). Smaller than you'd expect (at 65.7mm x 135.7mm x 26 mm), along with 'X', 'Y', 'A' and 'B' face buttons it features 'L' and 'R' shoulder buttons, plus 'Z1' and 'Z2'. Between these, a further button opens slots on the joypad's rear, although the purpose of these apertures remains unclear at the time of writing. Like the Nunchuk, the Classic Controller must be connected to a Remote via a cable.

SENSOR BAR

Placed on or around your television (either above or below the screen – it can be placed in its own cradle), the sensor bar handles Remote input via a receiver at each end. Approximately 200mm wide, it is unobtrusive, and styled to look as innocuous as possible. At the heart of the Wii experience, its reliability in tests is proven, although it is reported to be sensitive to strong halogen lights situated either directly above or below, which can interfere with its performance.

BATTALION WARS 2

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** DEVELOPER: **KUJU** ORIGIN: **UK** RELEASE: **2007**



The all-but-ignored *Battalion Wars* might seem an odd choice for an insta-sequel on Wii. But it's one of the few Nintendo franchises in a position to prove that thirdperson blasting can work with Wii control – and, if the Japanese title (*Totsugeki Famicom Wars W*) is anything to go by, the closest we'll get to an actual *Advance Wars* on Wii. And it *does* work. Walking with the Nunchuk analogue stick and aiming with the Remote requires a crunching cranial gearshift to 'connect' the Wii's twin controllers in your mind. Following that, steering man and machine is effortless – as is *leading* man and machine, with the 'A' button sending your squadmates tramping towards a targeted enemy. *Zelda*-esque lock-on, and a crosshair that glows red as it roves over nearby evil, ease you in further. There's a surprisingly palpable sense of unfolding war here. Albeit a fairly cute and, in battlefields shown so far, linear war.

Crucially, *Battalion Wars 2* fills the gaping multiplayer-shaped hole of the GC original, with (as yet unseen) Assault, Skirmish and Co-Op modes making the game one of the first to show how Nintendo will wage online war with Microsoft. The addition of naval units, along with the ability to spawn new units from dedicated Facilities, promises some absorbing battles.



Retaining the original's cartoony vibe, this is a better-looking game than *Battalion Wars* – it runs in true widescreen, for a start, giving you a better view of the battlefield – but not dramatically so



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE** ORIGIN: **JAPAN** RELEASE: **AT LAUNCH**

Although the decision to port the latest *Zelda* across from GameCube was a strategically brilliant stroke – landing the Wii with a bona-fide epic, and sop to the core gaming audience, on day one (and distracting from the absence of *Mario/Metroid*) – it also sent out a mixed message that's not untangled by another quick hands-on. *Twilight* continues, at times, to feel like a square peg in a round hole.

In fairness, the fishing demo is excellent, probably the best current example of a more complex Wii control scheme, requiring as it does a long string of actions: raise, throw, twitch, grab, reel in with the Nunchuk, repeat. But the main scheme, showcased in a short dungeon-style environment, is a seemingly illogical elaboration of the economical set-up we've enjoyed since *Ocarina Of Time*, dividing sword attacks between buttons and gestures with both remote and Nunchuk, removing any thirdperson camera control, splitting firstperson aiming between the stick (for view) and the pointer (for the cursor), turning the fairy from agent of streamlined simplification to a tool for the skilled.

It will almost certainly fall into place over time, but the overall – and, you have to think, desired – effect is to complicate *Zelda*, increase its challenge and narrow its appeal, where *Ocarina* sought to do anything but. The pleasure gleaned from an expertly-launched arrow or well-landed bass is undeniable, but a closer look at a more complete iteration of the game is required to see how it enhances the overall *Zelda* experience. See **E**169's extended preview for just such a thing.

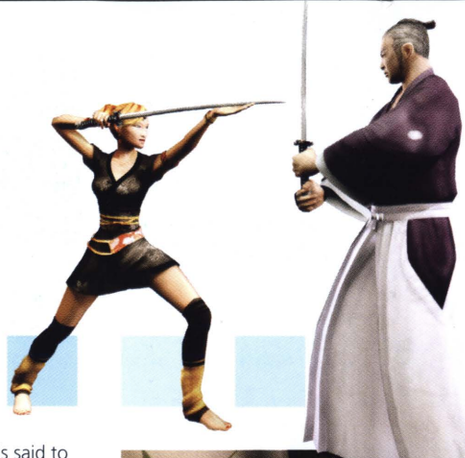


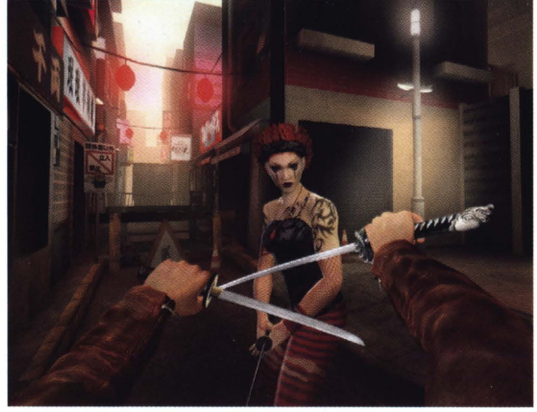


Unquestionably the best-looking Wii game Nintendo has yet shown, *Twilight Princess* makes good use of HDR lighting effects. Other visual touches are even more subtle

RED STEEL

PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT** DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**
ORIGIN: **FRANCE** RELEASE: **AT LAUNCH**





Twilight Princess aside, *Red Steel* is said to have been the most expensive to make of all the Wii launch titles, and there's an obvious visual disparity between Ubisoft's richly rendered game and the likes of, say, *Elebits* (below). Certainly this firstperson shooter/slasher has more in common with typical Xbox 360 and PS3 fodder than any other Wii title, with its sombrely lit environments, hard-boiled characters and central motif of Japanese gang warfare.

The game has also done more growing up in public than any of its peers (again, bar *Twilight Princess*), having been Nintendo's original Wii poster child and therefore a strongly scrutinised project. It's thanks partly to extensive feedback that Ubisoft has refined, and then refined once more, *Red Steel*'s control scheme, which felt unconvincing at E3 but more capable at Nintendo's September Wii demo events.

Ubisoft has reportedly revamped it further since to ensure that wielding two blades simultaneously using both Nunchuk and Remote feels more naturalistic, and that navigation and firearm aiming is smooth. The key, it has become clear, lies in making use of the controllers' unique qualities rather than simply emulating mouse and keyboard control.



Swordplay in *Red Steel* is executed via sweeping gestures (and Nunchuk control for blocks), with gunplay handled by more straightforward pointing of the Remote

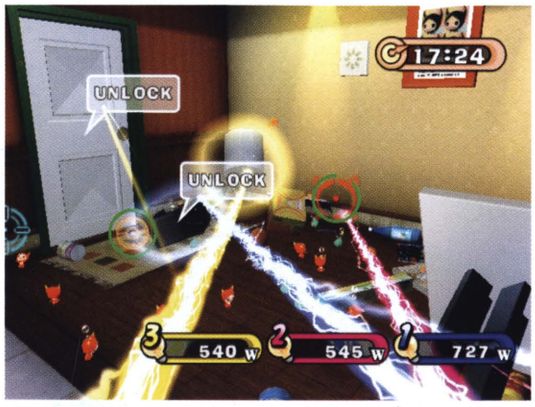
ELEBITS

PUBLISHER: **KONAMI** DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE** ORIGIN: **JAPAN** RELEASE: **Q1 2007**

Wii

Konami describes *Elebits* as a game of 'hide and seek', but, although it is one of the most immediately accessible – and immediately enjoyable – titles we've played on a Wii console, there's more to it than that.

The latest demo presents an environment only marginally expanded from the one in the game's debut showing at E3 in May, with a kitchen/dining room backing on to a garden, in which you must ferret around with a device capable of throwing out an energy beam capable of capturing the titular alien creatures.

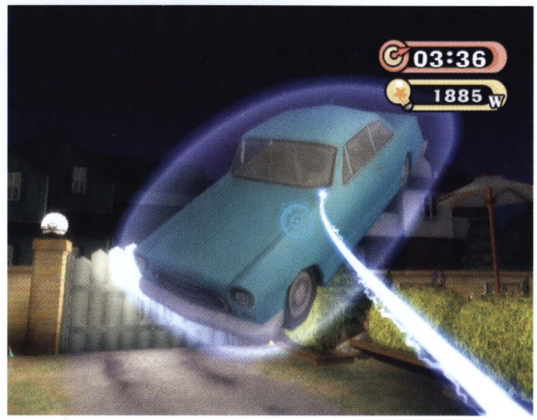


The story has it that the Elebits appeared on Earth to provide an alternative energy source, but have now disappeared – taking the energy with them. The upshot is that the appliances in the kitchen, for example, do not work until you've captured enough energy-carrying Elebits, by simply pointing at and zapping them. Then you're able to pop bread into the toaster and switch it on, forcing more Elebits to pop out of its slots. Harvest more energy and bigger appliances become activated, allowing you to operate the microwave oven and so on, letting loose more Elebits as you progress.

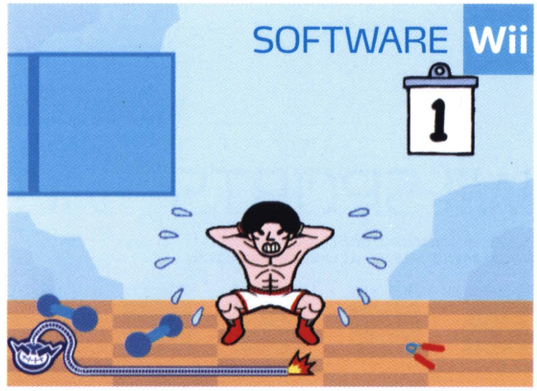
No, it doesn't sound like it should work, but the control system, which performs instinctively, allowing you to easily navigate the 3D space and quickly target cascading groups of Elebits with few hitches, allied to the overblown physics system, which reduces the power of gravity for effect, ensures that this is much more than the curio it first appears.

Or at least it has the potential to be – we've yet to see how its structure will incorporate the picking up and manipulation of objects as amusingly large as neighbouring houses.





Interacting with some of the game environment's features isn't always obvious – in the kitchen, for example, the instruction to 'TWIST' to operate the tap means that you must actually manipulate the Remote as if you were using a screwdriver. Picking up objects, however, is a much more easily – yes – graspable concept



WARIO WARE: SMOOTH MOVES

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE** ORIGIN: **JAPAN** RELEASE: **Q1 2007**

Wario Ware is all about reducing the cognitive gap between command and action to a split-second spark of instinct – see it, do it, without stopping to think how – and so, theoretically, is Wii. But their inevitable pairing isn't quite the match made in heaven you might well expect. You're told to adopt a particular grip (the Waiter, the Handlebar, the hands-on-hips Big Cheese) before each microgame, slowing the pace considerably, snapping the instruction and your understanding of it in two, and, to an extent, preparing you for what's coming next – surely a sin in Wario land.

There is some compensation, though: the series' rampant imagination and humour is multiplied by the Remote. True to form, the *Wario Ware* team has brainstormed its way through years' worth of Wii prototyping in the game development equivalent of speed-dating, coming up with endless novel uses for the Remote – prod! balance! drink! drive! – and matching the onscreen absurdity with the physical antics of those playing. If *Smooth Moves* can combine its encyclopaedia of silliness with the GameCube version's flair for multiplayer mayhem, it will justify its ever-so-slightly halting transition to Wii with ease.



Some rounds you can cheat through – rope-skipping, for example, where a jolt of the Remote will do in place of an actual jump – so you'll need friends to keep it all in order

EXCITE TRUCK

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO/MONSTER**
ORIGIN: **JAPAN/US** RELEASE: **Q1 2007**

With most Wii games there's a minute of acclimatisation, a momentary, messy fumble for the right grip, motion, or direction. Not so *Excite Truck*: controlling this racer is as painless and instantaneous as you can imagine. You may hold the controller like a steering wheel but you use it like a giant analogue stick, tilting and flicking your off-roader around the extravagant courses with slight, subtle movements. It's like riding a bike – a scrambler, to be precise, since it inherits the *Excitebike* series' emphasis on adjusting pitch and yaw to launch into huge jumps and land squarely from them.



***Excite Truck*'s most arresting visual asset is its speed: on an open stretch and with boost igniting in your engine, it absolutely flies. And retaining control of your wagon at such velocity isn't difficult**

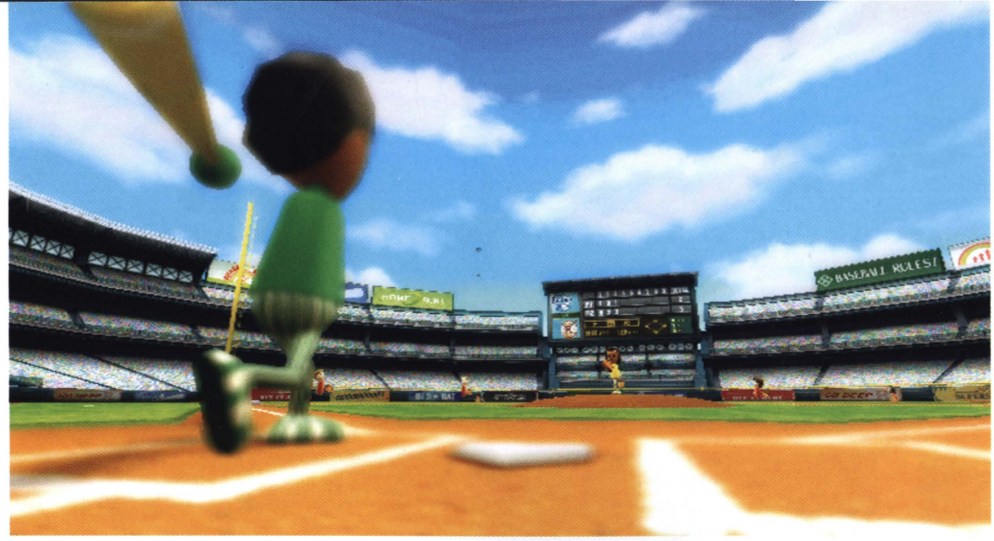
This is a much breezier, brasher, faster-paced game, though.

Between the first-principles reinvention of *Wii Sports* and the retrofit overhaul of *Zelda*, there's a homely sort of pleasure to be found in a bread-and-butter console game that's made the transition to Wii without breaking a sweat, allowing Nintendo and Monster Games to concentrate on the usual round of cross-breeding and educated theft instead. Coupling the big-air dynamic to immediate boost rewards is a smart synthesis; hammering the '2' button after crashing for a quick restart keeps the tempo up; and the crash bonuses and the event markers that dynamically deform the track should add a touch of *Mario Kart*'s cruel capriciousness to multiplayer.



WII SPORTS

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**
ORIGIN: **JAPAN** RELEASE: **AT LAUNCH (PACKED IN)**



In its modest way, *Wii Sports* is the game Nintendo's Wii was made for, its *Super Mario 64*. Its inclusion with every console in the west is a generous stroke, as well as a savvy recognition of the fact that its extreme simplicity – graphically and otherwise – might see it left on the shelf in these more cynical and entrenched gaming markets.

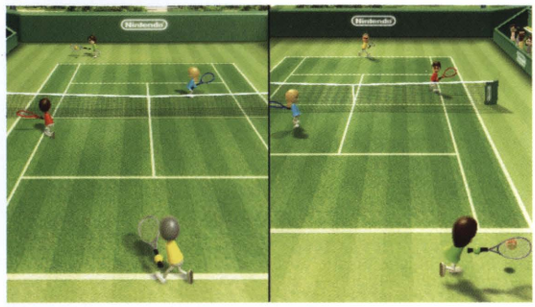
Sports makes perfect sense of every aspect of the Wii design template as soon as you turn it on, from the Miis that will put your friend's face (or at least an endearingly simplistic representation of it) at the other end of the tennis court (or of your fist) to the remote's speaker, announcing bowling turns with a chime, swooshing and popping with every stroke in tennis.



***Wii Sports*' avatars can be created in Wii's Mii Channel, although not being able to choose sports-specific outfits seems like something of an oversight**

Tennis, with its automated footwork and subtle assistance to your hits, is perhaps the easiest sport to get to grips with, although not without subtlety. Bowling, baseball and golf all boil down to the refinement of a single action, and really start to reveal the capabilities of the Remote. You'll begin bowling using the directional arrow to aim your ball directly at a specific pin, and then launch it with a straight swing of the arm; later your familiarity and confidence will grow and you'll start playing around with spin.

Golf in particular is excellent: smartly designed, it rewards smoothness and grace, and will be the most enjoyable alone. The standout, though, is boxing, an astonishingly intense and sweaty workout spliced with a surprisingly elegant and sophisticated design: questionable judging aside, its sheer physicality will revolutionise the friendly gaming grudge match forever.





Fortunately for the uncoordinated, you don't need to be an expert at real-life sporting disciplines to enjoy some success

SUPER MONKEY BALL: BANANA BLITZ

PUBLISHER: **SEGA** DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE** ORIGIN: **JAPAN** RELEASE: **AT LAUNCH**





If you're looking for sheer content, *Banana Blitz* fits the bill, with 300 'normal' levels and a broad roster of minigames

The banana-bagging feast rolled up – exclusively – for the launch of GameCube; now *Monkey Ball* returns to give Wii well over its RDA of potassium.

On balance, tilting 300 arenas with the Remote probably isn't the first test Nintendo would want Wii newcomers faced with: the surprising sensitivity, coupled with an inability to 'lock' your rolling straight forward, makes tumbling off even the most innocent-looking bridge a frustratingly common experience. But with practice – and quite a bit of it – AiAi and friends' life expectancy rises.

The feel of actually reaching out and twisting the puzzle boards with your hand assumes Jedi-like qualities, and the new jump ability (on the 'A' button) goads you into excitingly experimental shortcut attempts. Doomed attempts, more often than not. As well as the usual minigame suspects like Monkey Target and Monkey Race (the latter twists the Remote 90 degrees for that steering wheel feel), *Banana Blitz* comes with a grab bag of multiplayer-focused microgames. Some of these are obvious (Home Run Derby = monkey baseball); some are exhausting (Hurdles involves 'drumming' with the Remote and Nunchuk); but almost all – even the innocuous Remote-flicking skipping rope test – have a different Wii technique to teach you, and show the increasingly aimless *Mario Party* a thing or two about breaking the ice at videogame parties. That's assuming, of course, that this won't be your fellow participants' first taste of a 'real' videogame. It's difficult imagining the over-60s, for example, cracking its controls.





They aren't the most dazzling advertisement for ATi's Wii graphics tech, but *Banana Blitz*'s graphics are suitably vivid

TRAUMA CENTER: SECOND OPINION

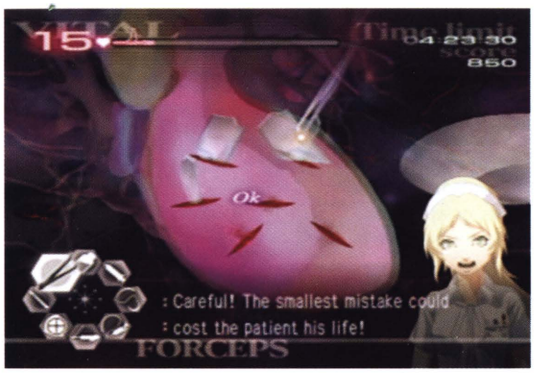
PUBLISHER: **ATLUS** DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE** ORIGIN: **JAPAN** RELEASE: **AT LAUNCH**

As the first touchscreen-specific DS hit to make the transition to the big-screen home environment (to be followed next year by the likes of *Nintendogs* and doubtless many others), one of the first Wii games to rely entirely on using the Remote as a pointer, and an early example of a very low-cost, low-impact thirdparty development for the console, *Trauma Center* is something of a proof of concept. And the concept definitely works.

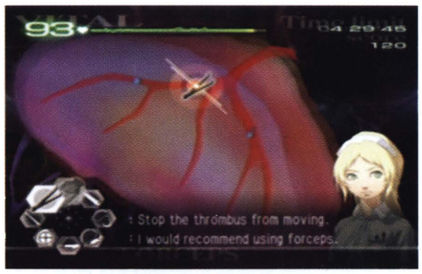
The Remote may be feel less like a scalpel than the DS stylus in your hand (although pinching the 'A' and 'B' buttons so that the controller becomes a set of forceps is pure tactile genius) but the overall effect of this game of Operation is just as convincing, and overpoweringly taut.

If anything, *Second Opinion* is slightly easier than the haphazardly tricky DS original, *Under The Knife*, since you can now select your implements from a wheel with a flick of the Nunchuk's stick, without needing to move your operating hand from where it's working. The corollary is that Atlus has been able to make a virtue of the Remote's extreme sensitivity; it amplifies the nerves induced by the tight time limits, pulsing soundtrack and queasy tasks into dangerous trembles and messy sutures, which of course only make it harder to keep a steady hand. This is intense where games like *Excite Truck* are loose and knockabout.

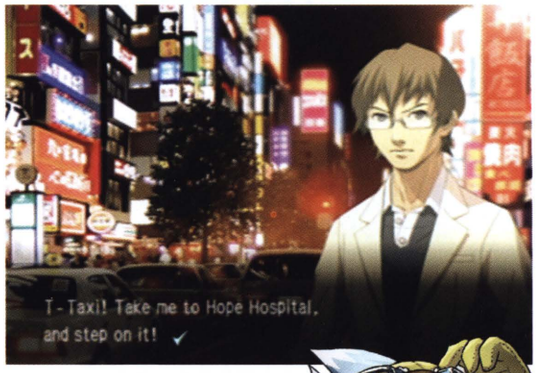
A wider audience might be put off by *Trauma Center*'s static manga stylings and exhaustive (if very educational) dialogue, but it already looks like a perfect fit for Wii, and firm proof that the increased sense of connection brought by the Remote can fill in for any amount of expensive audiovisual pizzazz, if used imaginatively.



Right from the beginning, *Trauma Center* looked like a perfect fit for Wii's unique controllers, and Atlus has already succeeded in realising some of its potential, especially in the way it's incorporating the opening and closing of forceps, etc



The standard of presentation hasn't changed since the DS version, with clean, manga-styled characters leading the way



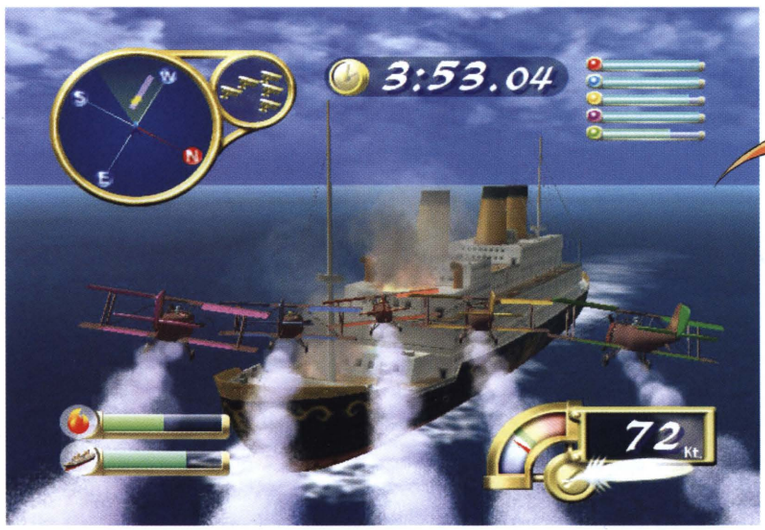
WING ISLAND

PUBLISHER: **HUDSON SOFT** DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**
ORIGIN: **JAPAN** RELEASE: **TBC**

The seminal *PilotWings* series aside, flight sims haven't found natural homes on Nintendo platforms. It makes sense, then, for Hudson's stab at the genre to be in many ways a patent *PilotWings* clone. Which is to say that it doesn't allow itself to get bogged down in trifling details like gauges and artificial horizons, and air-to-air combat is entirely off the agenda.

Wing Island is concerned instead with presenting a series of sometimes outlandish challenges which are commonly tackled by a squadron of planes (Hudson claims that solo-craft missions will also feature, but these were absent during our demo). One early mission involves dropping bombs on rocky structures sitting in a bay in order to clear a shipping lane; another charges you with locating a lost cow, then taking photographs of it; others see you simply popping a long, snaking trail of balloons, and dropping medical supplies in strategic positions.

Control is via Remote, and mostly responsive – although it's worth noting that the biplanes that take centre stage aren't built for extreme aerial performance. Nevertheless, a quick side-to-side shake of the Remote is enough to bring about a swift 180-degree turn, and there are doubtless many more manoeuvres to play with.







Changing your squadron's arrangement mid-flight will bear on your mission performance – opting for a wide spread is the way to go when you're fighting fire over an ocean liner, for example

Q&A: LAUREN FISCHER

NINTENDO EUROPE'S MARKETING CHIEF EXPLAINS THE THINKING BEHIND WII

One of the key figures leading Wii into Europe is a Frenchman working for a Japanese company from offices in Germany. He is **Lauren Fischer**, marketing director of Nintendo Of Europe, with whom we sat down to talk about taking the console to the masses, how DS has paved the way for success, and the Wii "Wow" factor...

Considering all of its additional, non-gaming functionality, how much time do you expect users to be spending playing games on Wii?
I think it's going to be very different according to the needs and profiles of the individual. The thing is, we're not saying it's a multimedia device, or a gaming machine, or whatever – it's in the centre of everything because it sits just below the TV. A gamer will play games on it and non-gamers will watch them moving, in the middle of the household, and ask, "What's going on here?" And they will play, too. Various members of the family will have gaming needs, and other needs too. The Wii Channels are not intended to compete with all of the other things that already exist, like internet blogs, picture viewers, news feeds, or whatever – it's just the concept of having these things in the centre, and having them very quick and easy to access. So it's not a matter of users playing games less, or more, or whatever, it's about creating a common tool for everyone in the household.

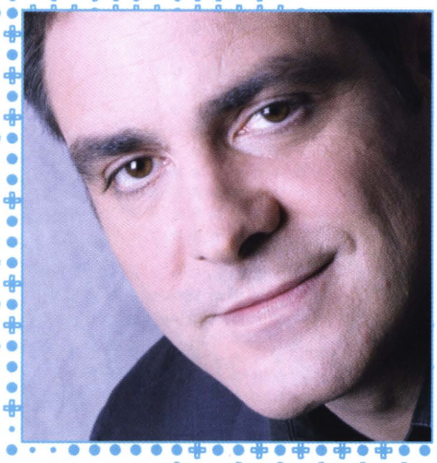
If you have four gamer friends living together with a Wii, they may not even think about checking the News Channel, for example – they will only use it for gaming – but if you have a regular household, with a lot of different ages, then the mother may check the Weather Channel, and others will use it for gaming, and so on. It's just about making these things friendly for everyone, that's the most important thing.

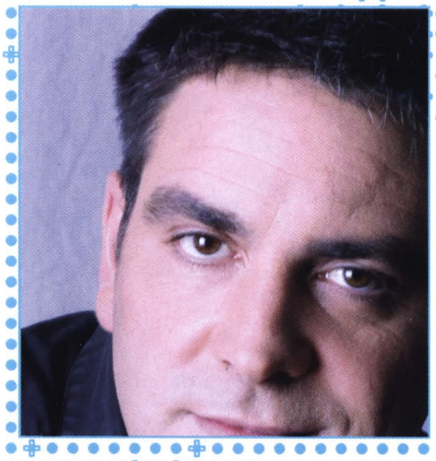
You're targeting a very broad user base, but how will you get these people to sample it?

> "We don't expect everyone to jump on Wii at launch time. We'll just grab attention slowly"

This isn't a console whose specific strengths can't be effectively communicated with TV ads, is it?
No, of course. It depends who you're aiming at. The first thing, for sure, is that we don't expect everyone just to jump on Wii at launch time. The first people will be the gamers, the ones who understand our Wii promise – the Wii gameplay experience – and then it will take time. We will be installing into households and we'll just grab the attention of people slowly, little by little. You'll have friends coming in and saying, "What is this thing?" And you'll say, "Ah, just try..." These things take time. But we're not in a hurry, we know it's a long way to get out of the videogaming ghetto.

The DS is a perfect example in terms of how long it's going to take, and, as Mr Iwata has said, it's even harder with a home videogame console than it was with a handheld like DS, which is still only beginning to make the transition – we're getting female users and casual gamers using the DS, but still the non-gamers, the ones who say, "Gaming is just not for me", they're still not there. In Japan they are already getting there –





that's why they're having outstanding sales: on a weekly basis they're still not able to fulfil the initial demand for DS Lite, simply because they're attracting a very broad audience. In Europe I don't expect us to be in that position for some time. But we're on the way. It will take one year, certainly, and with the Wii it will take the same time. We are not in a hurry.

The Touch Generations series has been really effective in reaching out to non-gamers. Do you have any kind of plan that says: We'll make a certain number of other games like that, and then a certain number of games for our traditional audience?
No, because that would mean you're able to know in advance precisely which games are going to appeal to which users. *Brain Training* is an interesting example – a lot of core gamers play *Brain Training* because core gamers are curious. To me, a good gamer is the one interested in seeking out new experiences, and that type of gamer isn't afraid of taking something like *Brain Training*, with its different controls and so on, and playing it. So we don't kind of say, "This is going to be a gamer's game and this is not".

A good example would be *Animal Crossing*. I think no one would have bet that *Animal Crossing* would be a very massmarket game – it was the most core-gamer game you could imagine, with users across the world completely crazy about it, living this second life. But then it became a bridge between core, *core* gamers and a wider gaming population, which includes females and people who are looking for a different gaming concept. This second-life concept, plus freedom, plus the DS, plus Wi-Fi connection – it's a magical mixture that you wouldn't have bet so much on in advance. In Japan they were surprised by the strength of *Animal Crossing*'s sales. And every week we just say, "Wow". You've seen in the UK charts how the game has done. We launched *Animal Crossing* on the GameCube in Europe – and I was one of the ones who really wanted it for this territory; we needed it because it really demonstrated the Nintendo difference – and we did something like 150,000 sales across all of Europe. And now we have more than 850,000 sales just on the DS, and the long sales trend is still there – in most territories it's still in the top ten.

With this long-tail sales model in mind, do you think other companies are following Nintendo's lead? We're certainly seeing *Brain Training* clones appear on non-Nintendo hardware, and other games that attempt to copy *Nintendogs*, for example.
I think basically it's a matter of... [carefully picks word] business. [Smiles] The thing is, when we are trying to go certain ways, which are against the wind, some people don't trust us to achieve anything, but once you've achieved outstanding results in a certain area, and if you understand how that works, you can focus on doing it again. For months and months people had to politely listen to me when I told them that there's no question that DS is stronger than PSP, because from the beginning I was really sure that was is happening now would happen. I saw around me, with my wife, for example – she was stealing my DS, and that never happened with other consoles. And then there were friends of mine – one of whom I used to play games with together when we were kids – he was getting out of gaming, saying, "I don't have time, it's no good for me", but every time he came to my house he would sit down with my DS. And I have this neighbour, an awful caricature of an old lady, who was playing *Zoo Keeper*. She'd played *Tetris* and now she was on to *Zoo Keeper*. If there was one person on Earth who wouldn't play a videogame, it was her. So, we are breaking through those barriers with DS, and we'll continue to do so with Wii.

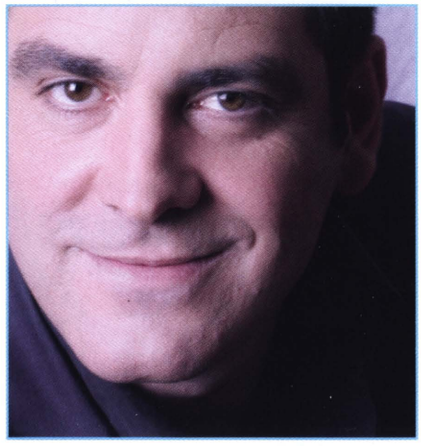
"We have core gamers forever because we always try to find new ways to play"

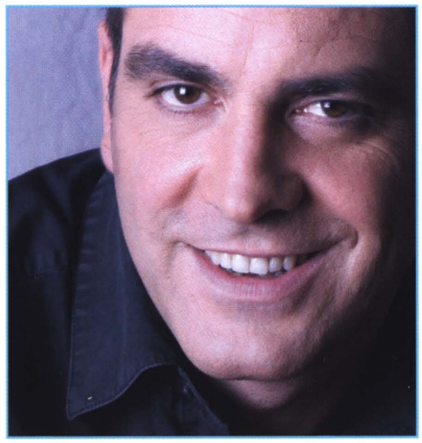
How much of an opportunity do you think Nintendo is giving Microsoft and Sony now that you're broadening your reach so widely?
This one's tough for me. I don't think real core gamers care about the platform. These people will buy a PC, if necessary, if they see something that they like on a PC. They'll go for the platform because of specific software or an experience that they want to have. The way I see it, a lot of core gamers are into the Nintendo universe, really. They will not have only Nintendo platforms, they will have Nintendo platforms and Microsoft and Sony platforms. So we have the gamers and we have them forever because we always try to find new ways to play, and deliver new experiences, something that's even stronger now with the DS and the Wii.

Maybe you can ask yourself: shall I get a PS3 or a 360? For sure, I think their line-up and positioning is quite similar. Yes, you have to consider people liking that brand or not, loving certain franchises or not, but basically to me the PS3 and 360 are the same area. At Nintendo we've stepped out of that, and I think we have big opportunities to be with all gamers, and we're better positioned to be with the ones who are not gamers right now.

Why are Wii games priced the way they are?
It's GameCube pricing, basically, and I think if you really want to appeal to a lot of people you must be reasonable with price.

So the hardware price is not tremendous, it's affordable at launch, and the software is the regular price we had in the last generation. So why should we increase the price? Part of the Wii concept is that we don't think every developer should be putting energy into just creating more realism, and extra graphical content. No, if you want to create something, you should concentrate on doing so with your brain, with your imagination, not simply technical resources. So if the game is very easy to create, like a *Wario Ware* game, why shouldn't we be able to put it out at a lower price? And a more classically styled game, such as *Zelda*, should be the price of a GameCube game.





And how did you arrive at the prices for Virtual Console releases?
Well, that's a good question. That's something which is worked out in Japan. A lot of people are saying, "This is abandonware, and you can play these games via emulation", but I don't think playing a NES game on a PC is something you will really love. Of course, you can play them on your PSP via emulation! [Laughs] Actually, most of the PSP owners I know are still using them for NES and SNES games.

The thing with videogames is that they're over 30 years old, and you have masterpieces that still stand up today. With movies, you may have a classic that's in black-and-white and it's 50 years old, but it still makes you say, "Whoah", and it's sort of the same for videogames – with the first *Zelda* on the NES, for example.

Putting all of these old games together and making them available for a lot of people in an accessible way, it's not too expensive, and it's important to be able to play them properly on your TV screen. It's kind of celebrating our industry, and that's why I'm very happy as well that it's not only Nintendo games, but also games from companies like Sega and so on.

Talking about these new users again, if you really want to find out what videogaming is, maybe it's good for you to start with the Virtual Console. If you're brand new to gaming, some of the basic games from the 8bit generation are about pure gameplay, so today they're still good fun – *Tetris*, for example.

Presumably you're not going to be spending a lot of money marketing the Virtual Console part of the Wii equation.
I think, in the beginning, we already have a lot of work to do in just demonstrating the Wii concept. And then there will be a second step where I will have to think about what we'll do with these things. But I really think that, just as it has been with Nintendo DS, it's not our marketing that will do the job, it's just people being happy with it. With the DS, we can spend money and tell nice stories in our advertising, but it's not us doing the job – it's the product, the games, the console itself, it's the people that hear once, twice, three times, four times from the people they know who are gamers, "Ah, it's good, you should try it", and then one day you talk to another person who wasn't previously a gamer who's now tried it, saying, "Yeah, I've got it, what about you?" And then six months afterwards, from the original position of thinking that Nintendo was not for them, they consider the DS, and it becomes relevant. You need hardware which is designed in that way, which was the case with DS and is the case with Wii. The best way to market something is just to have people sharing their good opinions of it.

"When I first started to play Wii it reminded me of the first time I played videogames"

So you don't really need to spend all these millions you have earmarked for marketing.
No! [Laughs] Well, to raise the awareness of things takes time. A lot of gamers will definitely know a lot about Wii right now, but you need to spend some money at first, and then it will be the first users who will do the job. What is very good for us is, just by looking at people playing Wii, we can see that everyone gets really interested in it. From having no idea what it is, just watching other people playing makes them interested. I think we need to just show people playing.

In the video you presented at the Wii event at ExCeL, the oldish man playing on the console looked a little intimidated, and certainly self-conscious. Almost...
Ashamed? [Laughs]

Almost.
Yes, I see what you mean. It's going into an unknown area that was previously sort of forbidden. You can see how we're challenging preconceived ideas. I'm always saying that I don't want to build fake things – we should use real people. Talk to someone: "Have you played? OK, please try it". I've been doing that with a lot of people since E3 where we demoed Wii for the first time, and if there's one common thing I always see – and this is the thing I love – I call it the funny smile. The wonder. With a gamer it's: "Wow!" And with a non-gamer it's "*Wow*!" The first time you hit the ball in *Wii Tennis*, and so on. The first time you miss it? OK, nothing. But then when it works: "Wow, I did it". And this is what I call the wonder, the funny smile.

If I'm seeing that reaction, I'm very comfortable. Our Wii videos feature real people – we really got people who were non-gamers, and it was their real reaction. I remember just before E3 when I started to play Wii it really reminded me of the first time I played videogames, when I plugged in my NES and pushed the buttons: "Wow". This wonder.


x
y
a
b
HOME
1
2
Wii
A
Wii
SELECT
HOME
START
1
2
POWER
Wii
POWER
A
Wii
SELECT
HOME
START
y
FREE WITH ISSUE 169 OF
EDGE